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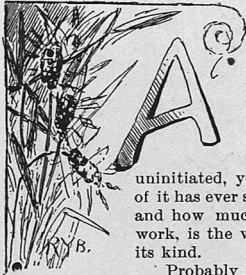
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# THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

## ABOUT JADES.

BY HELEN ANDERSON.



ALTHOUGH our fancy stores, and cheap "bric-a-brac" shops are filled to overflowing with all sorts and kinds of ornaments called by courtesy, Chinese and Japanese art works, and that no doubt pass for such with the uninitiated, yet it is surprising how very little of it has ever seen the shores of China or Japan, and how much of it that is actually Chinese work, is the very poorest and most inferior of its kind.

Probably there are very few of the great majority that ever see real Chinese art, as the best is generally purchased by the collectors almost as soon as it arrives here, or else passed from the hand of one collector to another, and in this way is not likely to be exhibited, for the benefit of any less favored than the great 400.

For example, the beautiful and almost miraculously carved Jades for which the Chinese are famous, although the best specimens of this work are not modern, the Chinese devoting less time to this class of art, as they become more imbued with European ideas. There are few of the ancient pieces, that have taken less than twenty years to complete, and many representing the labor of a lifetime, and ranging in price from fifty dollars up into the hundreds according to the quality of the Jade, design, and execution. Outside of the collectors, very few of the general public know, or hear but little of this form of bric-a-brac, if the term can be applied to such work, and yet Jades are as beautiful and curious, and far more interesting than the majority of Chinese work which is so much better known.

The word Jade, is a corruption of the Spanish "Hijada," since the mineral is one of the stones, which was known to the Spanish conquerors of Mexico and Peru, under the name of "Piedra de hijada," or "Stone of the Loins." The name has been popularly applied to several distinct varieties of ornamental stones, but belongs scientifically to a mineral species known as Nephrite, from "*νεφρος*" (the kidney); owing to the value of the mineral in renal diseases.

It is a native Silicate of Calcium and Magnesium, and varies in price according to the fineness of the mineral. Some of it though extremely valuable in China, is almost worthless here, as the value is largely dependent upon the fancy of the collector.

The color is subject to great diversity, some varieties presenting almost every shade of green, while others are yellowish gray, or white; green being the most valuable color. The most valuable specimens are called Fitsu, and are of a delicate emerald green in color. Among others in a collection which is now in the hands of one of the large furnishing and decorating establishments in this city, is a small white jade bowl, that is only a partial specimen of the Fitsu, and is valued at about \$150, although it has nothing in the way of carving or design as compared to many other pieces, yet it attains this value simply by the introduction of this delicate emerald green with which it is veined.

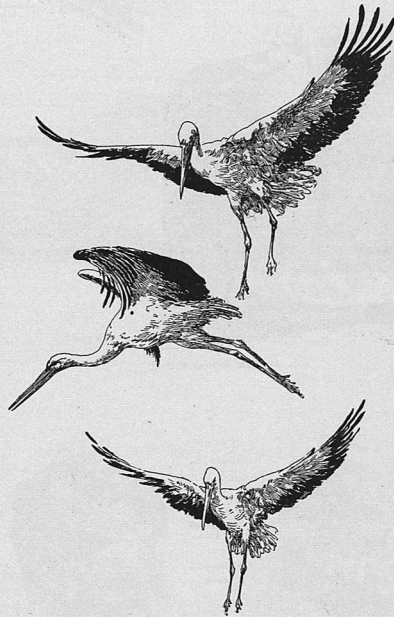
A cup called a love cup, and used at the Chinese wedding feasts, is most delicately and intricately carved, showing almost miraculous patience and skill in execution. To us with our wonderful labor saving machines, our economy of time, it seems incredible that men will labor for years, perhaps a lifetime to execute a mere ornament, and with only the aid of a bamboo-stick and diamond dust, as that is the only known mineral that acts upon or scratches jade; steel being utterly worthless. The hardness being six-fifths, but while the hardness is not excessive the mineral is remarkable for its toughness. The hardness of the stone, when freshly broken, is considerably less than that assumed by it, after a short exposure to the air.

The Chinese, like the Japanese, show in this as in all their work an intense love of variety, and they display a marvelous ingenuity in securing it. It seems as if no task were too difficult or tedious for them. There is very little doubt that much of their conscientious workmanship is owing to their national training and patience under discipline. Ruskin says, "real artists are absolutely submissive to law, and also entirely free in fancy." Perhaps no better description can be given of the conditions of Chinese and Japanese art. A beautiful piece of Jade, in which the leaves and stem of a peach tree are most exquisitely rendered, every veining and tracing of the leaves absolutely perfect, the branch so twisted as to form a bed or resting place for two peaches, is valued at about \$500. And when one considers the years of labor this represents, the beauty and perfection of design, the price is by no means excessive. Much of the Jade is obtained from quarries in the Kuen-lun mountains, or on the sides of the Kara Kash valley in Turkistan. The mineral is

found in veins, or nests, running through Schistres and Genisose rocks. Its specific gravity varies from 2.91 to 3.06 and offers one of the readiest means of distinguishing between this and other minerals with which it is likely to be confounded. An imitation of Jade is made by the Chinese by the use of a sort of rice composition, and might easily pass before a novice in the art, as the real article, but for the fact that when brought in contact with hand or face, it shows a degree or two more warmth than the Jade.

At the time of the Spanish Conquest, amulets of some Jade-like mineral were highly prized through Central Mexico and Peru. It has also been noticed in British Columbia, and it is supposed that Jade was the green stone so valued by the ancient Mexicans under the name of "Chalchihue," and by the Chinese as *yu* or *yu-chi*. In some of the most beautiful pieces, there occurs here and there a slight shadow of brown—whether this is an accident, or whether the artist considers that this brown shade enhances the price is unknown, but it is here regarded as a defect, and reduces the value to a considerable extent.

It is hardly possible that we shall ever imitate the Chinese in their best work, as we are by nature an impatient hurrying people; in fact, the Chinese of to-day, are not the slow labor



SOME JAPANESE BIRDS.

loving race their forefathers were, but while they are losing some of their ancient methods in art, they are also learning new industries, so that while much of the soft crepe and silk made in Paris, is doubtless a close imitation of Japanese (more than Chinese) material, they are also beginning to make velvet, which is not a native manufacture. In their carvings as in their decoration of porcelain and embroideries, they go straight to nature for designs. Almost every animal and plant is reverently noted and used. They care little for the school of this artist or that, but patiently learn of the great mother-of-all art and beauty. They also possess to a greater degree than other oriental nations, the instinct of color not only in the most subtle shading, but they are also masters of the art of direct contrast. The secret of this is a positive imitation of nature, and an absolute emancipation from formality, in the use of the objects of our ordinary surroundings.

They have no code for color or design, but use the great picture book, that Mother Nature is always ready to show her children when they are wise enough to appreciate and truly love the secret of all art.

We never attached much importance to the instructions given by some architects to decorators to so treat walls and ceilings as to increase the apparent size of certain leading apartments. It is true that all enrichments increase apparent size, but a decorator intent on carrying out to the full the above suggestion, will be apt to overcrowd space, and lose the charm of breadth of effect in a multiplicity of minute ornamentation.